

# *Just Write*

**Gloucester County Library System**

**Logan Township Branch**

**Writers Group**

**Selections**

**Volume 2, Issue 3**

**July, 2013**

Freeholder Director, **Robert M. Damming** | Freeholder Library Liaison, **Lyman Barnes**



## Table of Contents

FAMILY "TREES" AND GENEALOGIES *by* A Muhammad Ma`ruf

MY LIFE EXPERIENCES *by* Jane Harre

CURSIVE WRITING *by* Caroline Kalfas

Musings at the End of the Day *by* Marian M. Fay

The Ole Cowboy *by* John Witkowski

A Muhammad Ma`ruf,

## **FAMILY "TREES" AND GENEALOGIES**

Genealogy is broadly defined as the study and tracing of family lineages and history. The history of an individual's family can span across thousands of years and be linked to the history of even a larger number of other families. For practical purposes, families tend to limit the circle of their "family", usually as a way of establishing, encompassing and limiting "Us" and "Not Us" categories for the purposes of social interaction and exchange. Laws, customs, folkways, and mores attempt to define the rules by which such kinship groups are established and maintained. While the genealogical process is continuous, formal and informal genealogical discourses describe the shape of the outcomes of the process, at a particular time in history.

The construction of genealogies is practiced popularly now among many peoples of the world, leading to publications. From conversations I have had about this curiosity and hobby, I have concluded that genealogical research is something that many people are interested in and would like to pursue. However, only some actually engage in it and carry it to a conclusion. Doing it right involves a lot of work, with not so easily accessible historical records. I have also found that the uses of genealogical research are wider than those I have been familiar with from my own anthropological research and reading.

The word "genealogy" may sometimes refer only to the sciences related to the tracing of biological and genetic relationships among humans as well as other plant, animal, insect, bird, and other life forms. The term pedigree, often used as a synonym for genealogy, is also an important, marketable characteristic of dogs, cats, and horses for instance. Similarly, plants and trees have genealogies.

The larger dictionaries list several definitions for the meaning of "genealogy". The idea of descent is common to all of them. Descent would thus seem to be the key component of the idea of "genealogy". It is a matter of curiosity, perhaps only to new learners of English, that folk speech and popular literary use, e.g. on the internet, refer to the discovery of "family trees" as the intended outcome of genealogical searches. We see that in nature, trees ascend from the ground up. Typically, trees do not present a picture of descent. I have always found this misleading contradiction rather disturbing. In the ancient Sanskrit spiritual treatise the *Bhagavad Gita*, however, wise sages are said to speak of the Tree of Life, with its taproot above and the branches below.

The "tree" diagram image for descent relationships is in fact useful, because trees (and vines which need some other solid surface to grow on) have stems and branches which in turn have more branches. Family "trees" can grow from unknown origins to unknown ends.

It is useful to keep in mind that the fit of the tree image for the purpose of understanding genealogical relationships works only for imaginary trees which represent descent from the past to the present and from one form to another. At the level of words, rivers, streams, and roads also have a main body and branch bodies.

"Genealogical Chart" is often preferred by specialists to "Family Tree" as the name for the diagrammed outcome of genealogical researches.

The recent development of the popular practice of genealogical knowledge has some of the same goals as those of modern ethnographers who, from about the middle of the 19th century, have developed very sophisticated kinds of discourses related to kinship and genealogical research methods. These methods were aimed toward establishing the familial kinship and ancestry of individuals, filling in gaps in available beliefs, and correcting erroneous beliefs if such have prevailed, and toward understanding other structures in the wider society. The models of "society" in almost all cases of the early fieldwork based research of anthropologists were based on ideas and beliefs about kinship and genealogy. Ethnographers had made knowledge of certain techniques of genealogical research and description a basic competency required of their students. Most undergraduate level anthropology text books even now contain a chapter on kinship and genealogical relationships.

However, the specialized anthropological sciences related to this matter of common human interest has remained a separate field of study and discipline from the popular field of genealogical research that has emerged as a matter of widespread curiosity and activities, for instance, in US culture. The rise in this popular interest motivating many people and organized groups, to research their own genealogies, "family trees", and related matters is said to be a consequence of the popularity of *Roots*, a novel by Alex Haley published in 1976, and the subsequent movie.

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## MY LIFE EXPERIENCES

by

FORK

As told to Jane Harre

I can no longer recall my very early days as clearly as I would like, but I do remember that Fannie Fish was my first owner. It seems to me that I arrived in her home when she married John in 1892, and “went to housekeeping”, as the saying was then. She kept me in the drawer of a cupboard with a few other tools when I wasn’t in use, but that was mostly at night. During the daytime, starting early of a morning, Mr. Big Knife, Miss Gravy-Stirring Spoon, and pretty little Paring Knife and I were hardly out of use. We kept good company with Iron Frying Pan on the hot Wood Cook Stove, and of course, Kettle never left her spot, singing all the while.

In the beginning of our lives together, we simply prepared food for Fannie and John, but as Fannie often said, “When you marry, expect children,” and so, children came. Of course, this increased our work there in our Kitchen-home, but we knew the purposes for which we were made and we were happy to serve the family. Fannie loved us in an unspoken way, the way of dependence. If one of us got misplaced, she didn’t seem to know how to fix a meal without us. How wonderful to be so useful. I was washed frequently and sometimes dried. It didn’t matter much, because I would get right back to work.

Our Kitchen-Home was in a farm house as John was a farmer. The children grew and the meals did, too, and other hands held me, learning kitchen skills.

When Fannie and I were getting a bit older and the children grew up and began to marry and have homes of their own, or even bring a bride home for a while, still more hands used my skills. Eventually, we moved to town. That was a different way of life for the family, but not much change for me; I was still so busy. But then, John got very sick and died. Fannie and I and the entire household were so sad. We didn’t know what to do with ourselves after all those years of meals for John—what were we to do now?

Before long, big changes came. Most of my companions were sold to other owners, who were glad to give them homes. I, however, was one of the lucky ones and got to stay with Fannie, but then, instead of family living with Fannie, Fannie and I went to live with some of the family. Raymond and Jennie had a big gang to cook for, and the youngest was still an infant. Fannie loved the little ones and their little “patty-paw” hands. Rocking Chair and Sewing Stand were set by a window. Scissors, Needles, Rug-crochet Hook and I could still keep in touch. Spoon had been sold and I had to get to know my new neighbors in a new drawer-bed. Now, it seemed that Jennie was my new mistress, most of the time, but I wasn’t her only Fork; that took a little getting used to!

Nevertheless, it was a happy, busy life, and Fannie and I still lived together. Even if it was Jennie and I who poked the green beans or asparagus, or turned the “fried bread”, it was often Fannie who dried me and put me in the cupboard after one of Jennie’s girls had washed and rinsed me and set me with the other clean, wet workers.

We did make a couple of moves, but I didn’t complain; we were all together, and there was always a hungry tableful to make my life count. But, of course, Jennie and Raymond’s family grew up, as families do, and many hands learned how to handle me well, so I had a happy life. Fannie and I had begun to be a bit worn down, but that’s what time and work do to a body.

I wasn’t really prepared for what happened next. Even though Fannie was in Kitchen-home less and less, the day she left to go to the hospital, I had no idea that after all of our years under the same roof she would never return. Within a couple of months, Bowl told me that we were no longer Fannie’s possessions as she had been called to the new home which had been prepared for her, where Forks and Bowls were not needed. Oh my...if I hadn’t been so busy with Jennie and the girls, I would have simply sat in the corner of Tray and cried myself into a heap of rust.

As it happened, instead of continuing in the now familiar farm kitchen in this difficult time in my life, there came another big change. The infant with the “patty paws” had married and she and her husband and new infant daughter took me to help out in in their “new” home which had actually been the home of Fannie’s niece, in town. That was comforting as some of Florence’s utensils were still living there and we were able to speak of old times and old loves.

Of course, I had plenty to do as the bride learned her trade, cooking to please her young husband, who wanted a little more variety than the fried meat, boiled potatoes and milk gravy that had been the standard fare of Raymond and John, before him. Janie and I worked together, although she really was a novice. We had had a bit of practice when she was still back in the farm kitchen with Jennie. We had sometimes made the filling for deviled eggs, or stirred up scrambled eggs, so we were not strangers. And of course, she had many times been the dishwasher when Fannie was still the one with the dish towel.

So, here I was in my new life, and we worked on it together, and again, Fannie’s words echoed down the years: “When you get married, expect children”. Two more came to live with my family. I changed drawers a couple more times, too, and more and newer tools moved in with me.

All the while, my tines were wearing shorter and thinner, but that simply made them sharper and Jane has always preferred me for testing the potatoes’ doneness. The daughters took their turns in learning my usefulness, and even the son. Eventually, sometimes a grandson took me in hand. I’ve done it all.

But really, my present drawer is pretty comfortable and life goes on as usual. I still stir eggs, make the filling for deviled eggs and poke the beans. However, I recently felt my age as never before. Somehow, instead of the usual soak in hot soapy water, a short scouring, draining and drying before a rest in the dark, I started off standing in the dark in a rack I had never seen before. Crowded in with my

co-workers, I hardly had a chance to ask Table Knife, standing next to me, what was happening, when suddenly, water blew up all around us. What a lot of noise and commotion for this old soul! I could hardly take it. After a while, the sudsy water stopped but we got very hot. Why was this happening to me? I had never been so mistreated in my whole long life. Finally, even the heat subsided and we got to rest awhile, even if we still had to stand on handles or tips—such an unaccustomed position for me, and at my age, too.

Well, at last the ordeal was over and our prison door was opened and the light flooded in. As our Rack was lifted out, I felt so relieved, and I heard my mistress say, “Oh my, how did you get in there?” which was what I had been wondering all those long hours. She took me up, scoured my tines a little, dried me softly, and laid me down in my own bed, the only place an old fork like me should have to spend the night!

## **CURSIVE WRITING**

By Caroline Kalfas

My son received mail from his grandmother the other day. She writes in cursive. I can remember a time when I would have to read such a letter to him as he looked over my shoulder and asked, “What’s that word?” But thanks to the local schools, my son can read cursive writing.

Other kids may not be so lucky. What I am reading online – which is not in cursive – is that many schools across the nation have stopped teaching this form of writing. Apparently, it’s up to the local school districts to decide in New Jersey whether cursive writing is taught. Thankfully, my son’s school district sees its advantages. I agree that learning to type in today’s world of technology is a mandatory skill that each student should learn. And it’s a skill that requires the use of both hands, not just two thumbs. But cursive writing is important, too. It’s a sign of maturity to be able to read and write in cursive. When I was growing up, I wanted a library card.

“That’s a big responsibility,” my mother said.

“When can I get one?” I asked.

“When you can write your name in cursive,” she said. “That’s the rule.”

As kids, handwriting was an indicator of who we were as individuals – neat or sloppy. We could identify each other by our handwriting. We knew who wrote with tiny letters and who wrote big. We admired the way the best writers in our class made the graceful curves of their capital letters. We worked hard to perfect our own writing. On our report cards, penmanship was listed as a primary subject along with language arts, math and science.

Granted, times have changed. But the value of cursive writing remains. Signatures are written in cursive. The U.S. Constitution was written in cursive. Thank-you notes should be written in cursive. Cursive has its advantages. Practicing letters over and over helps students develop their motor skills and teaches them the importance of accuracy, patience and concentration. Cursive writing is more formal and exudes a message of importance. It’s faster than printing when taking notes in class or business meetings. Do we want a president who cannot read a post card from his grandmother because it is written in cursive writing? Do we want engineers, doctors, lawyers and scientists who can only print their knowledge? If some schools teach the curriculum and others do not, cursive writing is going to separate the educated and the uneducated.

I asked my son, a fifth grader, if he thought cursive writing is important. He often has to print his spelling words and then write them in cursive. He got 5 points off recently because of a faulty letter.

“Yes, it’s important,” he said defiantly. “Do you think I can get a job if I don’t know how to read and write in cursive?”

I am thankful my son can put this basic skill on his resume. My son has an awesome signature, too – and a library card.



**Musings at the End of the Day**  
**By Marian M. Fay**

You can't see that I worked hard today,  
Folding, scrubbing, washing and deodorizing,  
My shoulders painfully retain  
Each movement much to my disdain  
I wonder why the mind can't hold onto memories  
The same way as the other muscles retain  
Painful echoes of the day's simple gains.

If I don't write down my thoughts I'd feel  
That maybe this day wasn't real  
I seem to move in similar patterns daily.  
My body seems to stay the same  
Only the seasons and the clothes change.

I sit and rock and sometimes stop,  
Either lost in sleep, dreams, or thoughts.  
Time winds up and time winds down  
Have I ever done anything to astound  
People I know and people that I don't?  
What legacy is purposefully left in my wake?  
Is there anything for anyone to take?



### The Ole Cowboy

Now we know for every twenty troubadors that's a man  
There is a trobairitz, a woman  
How could we believe the Ole Cowboy  
And not accept a cowgirl that's a joy.

Blown out of proportion many a day  
This Old Man praises that May play  
Caught betwixt there and here and made of clay  
With joints that sometimes work and often with a delay.

All four will converse  
Most of the time in song  
All recognize the villain perverse  
And give the hero a gong.

The writer of this verse  
Be a man, In the past a cowboy cursed  
Especially by those wishing him in a hearse  
When all they did was rehearse a reverse.

That means practice as in  
Revamping their universe  
Employed simply not to blind  
To the four below stated rules'

These are basic to all mankind  
Be I human, made of clay, Then  
There be a power of the many a universe  
That's really not be me brethren.

If you see me smile  
That's from within, and with the tip of a brim  
I pass it onto you my friend  
For its to give away since its mine.

To complete, the start of many a complaint  
Trust in that Power that Be  
Freely presented to Thee  
Now a grate on those that ain't.

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**Meetings Held 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays @**

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